

bulletin of the
food
ethics
 council

Cheese and Onion Sandwich

INGREDIENTS: Malted Wheatgrain Bread (48%) (Wheat Flour, Water, Malted Wheatgrains, Yeast, Barley Malt Flour, Wheat Flakes, Salt, Sugar, Vegetable Oils, Buckwheat, Cheddar Cheese (24%), Red Leicester & Mayonnaise (16%), Seasoned Spring Onion (8%), Salt, Ground Black Pepper.

ALLERGY ADVICE: CONTAINS GLUTEN, EGGS, SOYA, MILK, MUSTARD

NUTRITION INFORMATION

Typical Values	Per 100g	Per Pack
Energy	1458 kJ / 350 kcal	2231 kJ / 536 kcal
Protein	11.9 g	18.2 g
Carbohydrate of which sugars	22.1 g / 1.4 g	33.8 g / 2.1 g
Fat of which saturates	23.8 g / 6.8 g	36.4 g / 10.4 g
Fibre	0.1 g	0.2 g
Sodium	0.3 g	0.5 g
Salt Equivalent	0.8 g	1.3 g

GUIDELINE DAILY AMOUNTS

Guideline Daily Amounts for an Average Adult	Per Pack		(GDA%)	
	Women	Men	Women	
Calories	2000	2500	536	(27%)
Fat	70 g	95 g	36.4 g	(52%)
Salt	5.0 g	7.0 g	1.3 g	(26%)
Fibre	18 g		0.2 g	(1%)

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The Bulletin of the Food Ethics Council seeks to challenge accepted opinion and spark fruitful debate about key issues and developments in food and farming. Distributed quarterly to subscribers, each issue features news and analysis from people actively involved in producing food and shaping policy.

The Food Ethics Council challenges government, business and the public to tackle ethical issues in food and farming, providing research, analysis and tools to help. The views of contributors to this bulletin are not necessarily those of the Food Ethics Council or its members.

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Choice words and weak government



Sir; Michele Field (*Nazi nutrition* | Summer '06, pp. 7-8) is aghast at the initiatives our government takes in regard to food choice: we should all be aghast at the lack of initiative it takes in regards to the actual food. 'Choice' is a spin-word and meaningless when the government is too weak to affect the junk food offered by the food industry.

The Nazi food strategy was intrinsic to the development of the Nazi war machine. Britain was blessed with brilliant food advisers to the government during the war, such as Jack Drummond, who

fine-tuned the 'Points' system, a crucial element in food rationing. Historians could usefully, and relevantly, argue about which part of it led to the health of the nation being better than before or since.

It is delightful and surprising to hear that we 'self-ration' now. It depends what circles you move in. The government knows that obesity is associated with poverty and that the poor (unlike peasants) have to eat the cheapest and most 'unnatural' food. Let's all be gourmet, if we can afford it (do gourmets eat with their children?), but let's not get our history in a twist with our private agenda.

'Nestor', East Sussex
Name and address supplied

Nutrition gets medical

Sir; Unless the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition has a radical change of heart when it delivers its delayed report to the Food Standards Agency, it is likely to recommend that folic acid be added to most UK flour

If so, this will be the first extension of mandatory flour fortification since calcium (in 1941) and iron, vitamin B1 and nicotinic acid (in 1953). Proponents expect increased folate consumption to reduce the incidence of neural tube defects such as spina bifida.

Critics warn that the bigger problem of vitamin B12 deficiency in the elderly may be masked. As a public health strategy, fortification with folate is contentious, because it risks creating a false sense of security in women of child-bearing age or over-consumption of folate by the already well-fed.

The debate also reveals crucial fault lines in the development of our food system. Are we to devolve responsibility for health to a food industry already eager to 'add value' by selective additions to basic foods? Or should 'consumer choice' be harnessed to a critical awareness of the depletion of nutritional quality brought about by industrial production and processing?

Modern wheats have a third less minerals than older varieties. Long fermentation increases the natural folate content

of bread. The real choice is between medicalised nutrition or health based on the integrity and vitality of carefully grown and minimally processed crops.

Andrew Whitley
www.breadmatters.com

Consulting on co-existence

On 20th July DEFRA published its much delayed public consultation on proposals for managing the co-existence of GM with conventional and organic crops.

DEFRA says the measures it is proposing are designed to provide a real choice for consumers and farmers by allowing the crops to coexist while keeping them separate, thus not excluding any form of agriculture from the EU.

However, the measures are designed to allow routine contamination of non-GM and organic crops up to a threshold of 0.9 percent that DEFRA says would not have to be labelled as containing GM. This means that 'real' choice would only begin over a level of 0.9 percent GM contamination and would not include a GM-free option.

DEFRA has also said that in the real world there is no way to prevent contamination by GM crops, ignoring the facts that we do not have GM contamination at the moment and that the introduction of GM into farming does not have to be inevitable.

The consultation also questions the need for a public register of

If you want to respond to any of the articles in this issue or raise a different point please write us a letter. We also publish full-length articles 'in response'. We can only publish a limited number of articles, so please get in touch before putting pen to paper. Our contact details are on the contents page.

where GM crops are grown, meaning that most people would not know if the crops are being grown in their area. It also excludes gardeners, allotment holders and farmers who save seeds from being informed if GM crops are to be grown nearby and hence protecting themselves against contamination.

We would encourage anyone who cares about the integrity

of the food chain to respond to the consultation. The deadline is Friday 20th October and the full consultation document is available at:

www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/gmnongm-coexist/index.htm.

A guide on how to respond is available at: www.stopgmcontamination.org.

Pete Riley, Director, GM Freeze
www.gmfreeze.org

From the editor

Secrecy needn't be a bad thing. Rules on privacy can safeguard against consumer exploitation, for example, while confidentiality can protect whistleblowers. Yet it is not by coincidence that all the contributors to this bulletin who touch on the theme of secrecy highlight instances of its abuse – in food and farming, secrecy all too often means blocking legitimate public scrutiny.

At the Food Ethics Council it is our work on veterinary drugs that most often runs up against secrecy. There, excessive restrictions on public access to information about the safety and efficacy of products used to treat farm animals have persisted despite Freedom of Information rules implemented last year.

In this issue we hear similar stories from other parts of the food sector. For example, Jeanette Longfield and Jo Murphy-Lawless talk about less-than-open consultation processes. Nick Robins makes the case for compulsory disclosure of corporate social and environmental performance. David Goodman and Sue Haddleton reveal aspects of food production that are hidden from consumers.

It seems our food system hangs together by being economical with the truth. This clearly isn't in the public interest. Could a more enlightened attitude across government ensure that it wasn't in the interests of companies either?

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Jeanette Longfield

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Analysis: food advertising

How not to run a consultation

Secrecy is rife within the food industry. From Cadbury's keeping mum about salmonella in their chocolate, to soft drink companies failing to disclose that putting vitamin C in soft drinks could create the carcinogen benzene. However, Ofcom's consultation on television advertising of food aimed at children takes the metaphorical biscuit.

Ofcom was asked by the government in December 2003 to look at the issue of junk food TV advertising aimed at children. Ofcom didn't want this job from the start. And one can see why; after all, a decision to take radical action on junk food advertising is really a political decision that should rest with the government.

However, Ofcom has played this difficult hand very badly. In fact, it is hard to remember a consultation of this importance that has been handled less competently.

At heart, the reason for Ofcom's failure is the regulator's all pervasive culture of secrecy.

The Communications Act, which established Ofcom, clearly states that the organisation's primary responsibility is to "protect the interests of citizens and consumers". In practice, however, Ofcom has enthusiastically pioneered 'light-touch regulation'. The system is at best conducted in the half-light and, at worst is a glorified old-boy network where a nod and wink behind closed doors substitutes for open regulation.

Ofcom's TV arm has become primarily concerned with the smooth-running of commercial television. To do this it has had to develop close working relationships with broadcasters and advertisers resulting in something of a revolving door, with many senior

Ofcom staff recruited from the broadcast industry and hotly tipped to return there when their contracts expire. Stephen Carter, who recently stepped down as Ofcom's Chief Executive, is the bookie's favourite to be the next CEO of ITV.

Although this seems to suit both Ofcom and the industry it regulates, it means that business is transacted beyond public scrutiny. Their relationships are so cosy they can cross the line from collaboration into connivance. Campaigners fear this has happened with the consultation on junk food advertising.

In the almost two and a half years Ofcom took to arrive at its very limited proposals it has consistently failed to act in a manner appropriate for a public, and publicly funded, regulator.

Having seen how close the final recommendations were to the demands of the food and broadcast industries, Sustain was interested to see who Ofcom had spoken to as it formulated its conclusions.

This request was greeted with great suspicion by Ofcom staff, and our fears seemed realised when Ofcom admitted that they had met with industry 29 times, compared to four meetings with health and consumer groups. But the more we looked at it, the less things appeared to add up. For example, Ofcom had seemed to count two meetings held at the behest of the Department for Health – attended by Mike Rayner (a Sustain trustee) and industry along with an Ofcom staff member – as formal meetings to discuss the consultation. This seemed like an artificial attempt to boost the number of meetings with campaign groups.

Even more suspiciously, the list of meetings provided to us did not seem to include a number of meetings with the

regulator that friends from organisations like the National Consumer Council had attended. It took a second Freedom of Information request to find out that Ofcom had actually met with industry groups 118 times compared to 18 meetings with groups from the health and consumer lobby.

Ofcom has now refused to disclose to Sustain the proportion of replies to the consultation that asked it to be more radical in restricting junk food advertising. Hiding behind loopholes in the Freedom of Information Act, Ofcom is also unwilling to reveal the number of consultation replies that call for a 9pm watershed for junk food adverts.

Ofcom claims that this secrecy is justified as this information will be released to the public in due course. However, its previous willingness to spin data means campaigners have little confidence we will ever see an undiluted analysis of the views expressed during the consultation.

Just one example of this manipulation of difficult data in the consultation is Ofcom's opinion poll which showed that 48 percent of the public support a 9pm watershed for junk food adverts, compared to 24 percent in opposition. An independent reader might interpret this as relatively strong support for a 9pm watershed; for Ofcom it was a sign the proposal lacks popular appeal because it is supported by less than half the population.

Ofcom has a duty to operate openly and above the debate that, quite properly, campaigners and industry are involved in. Instead their approach has been partial, murky and secretive. We deserve better from our regulators.

More about

Junk food advertising
www.sustainweb.org/child_index.asp

Your diet tailored to your genes

Preventing diseases or misleading marketing?

Helen Wallace weighs up the evidence

In 2001, a UK company called Sciona won a government 'Smart Award' for small businesses. The company had developed a system of 'nutrigenetic' testing, combining genetic tests with dietary advice, claimed to be tailored to individual genetic make-up. Unlike earlier genetic tests, used within health services, Sciona was one of the first companies to begin marketing its tests directly to consumers – via its website and on the High Street, initially in Body Shop stores.

Sciona was a pioneer in the new and expanding area of personalised nutrition. Many scientists have stated that the fundamental goal and the next great challenge of the nutritional sciences is to tailor nutritional requirements to the individual and thereby optimise diets for health. The new science of nutritional genomics (nutrigenomics) is seen as underpinning this goal. There are two overlapping aims: developing new functional foods which can be marketed as providing health benefits for consumers; and personalising diet – tailoring diets to each individual's 'unique biochemical needs' using nutrigenetic tests and perhaps other types of test.

The advocates of personalised nutrition claim that as well as delaying the onset of disease it could optimise well-being and maintain human health. However, what happened to Sciona illustrates just one problem with this approach – the lack of regulation of genetic tests and associated claims.

When Sciona's tests were launched in Britain, GeneWatch conducted an investigation of the claims they made. We found that many of them were not backed by scientific evidence and that they could mislead people about their health. Our concerns were shared by many geneticists

and dieticians, led to a Which? investigation, and ultimately the withdrawal of the tests from sale directly to consumers. However, in 2005, Sciona relocated to the USA and began to receive venture capital investment from the major food ingredients companies BASF and DSM, who are interested in using nutrigenetic tests as a way of marketing personalised food products. Last month, the US Government Accountability Office (GAO) published a new investigation. The GAO, which reports to Congress, sent DNA samples from fictitious customers to four websites marketing nutrigenetic tests, three of which were selling tests made by Sciona. The resulting report once again concludes that the tests mislead consumers. It has led to calls by scientists and senators for much stricter regulation of genetic tests.

The results of the GAO investigation provide just one example of how personalised nutrition could harm health. Personalising dietary advice means privatising it, with different biotech and food companies selling different and potentially conflicting advice and associated supplements and new food products. This approach could in practice lead to a wide range of problems: targeting the wrong dietary advice at the wrong people, confusing healthy eating messages, undermining public health approaches, promoting new expensive products instead of fruit and vegetables, and diverting research and public health resources.

Prompted by food industry investment in nutrigenomic research, and in genetic testing companies such as Sciona, GeneWatch has now produced a major report on nutrigenomics and personalised nutrition. We found that there are good reasons to be sceptical about whether personalised nutrition will help to tackle the current epidemic of diseases linked with overeating. There are two main reasons for this:



Rich Frishman | The Medical File | Still Pictures

- genetic tests and functional foods are targeted at the wealthy and do nothing to help poorer people who are at higher risk of chronic diet-related diseases such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes.
- the usefulness of targeting dietary advice based on genetic make-up is also limited because genes are poor predictors of an individual's risk.

Although some nutrigenomic research may be useful, with some exceptions genetic differences appear to make only small and subtle differences to a person's risk of diet-related disease and hence very little difference to the foods they should eat.

For example, there is little evidence that individual variability in cholesterol

levels is genetically determined, except in relatively rare cases, and the most studied gene – called APOE – has been found to be of little use in identifying people who respond best to low-fat diets. The biological response to dietary fats is highly complex and is hard to predict for any individual, whether genetic tests or other biological measurements are used.

Too much saturated fat, sugar and salt is bad for everyone, and there is an enormous, growing gulf between dietary guidelines and what people actually consume. Tinkering with individual diets and new ingredients will not solve this problem – what is needed is political commitment to change unhealthy food production systems and marketing practices.

The concept of personalised nutrition also ignores the significant role that health inequalities and social and economic factors play in chronic diet-related disease.

Today's epidemic of obesity is influenced by agricultural practices and the global marketing of unhealthy foods. In Argentina, for example, the diet of the poor has shifted since the 1960s, from a varied balanced one, to one which depends on only 22 basic products, selected to satisfy the appetite but high in fats and sugars. The food industry fosters this behaviour by targeting the poor with mass, low-quality products that are cheaper but less healthy. These marketing practices also affect low-income families in Britain, who suffer from 'food poverty'. Poorer families tend to eat less healthily, consuming less fruit and vegetables and wholemeal bread and more white bread and processed meat products.

Our report concludes that personalised nutrition is the wrong priority for health, and misleading marketing of genetic tests and associated products also risks a major loss of public trust. Food manufacturers and biotech companies want to sell both personalised nutritional advice and associated 'healthier' food products at a premium. However, growth in expensive hi-tech 'personalised' foods will do next to nothing to help to tackle the frightening global increase in diet-related diseases.

More about

GeneWatch UK's report on nutrigenomics and personalised nutrition
www.genewatch.org/uploads/f03c6d66a9b354535738483c1c3d49e4/Nutrigenomics.pdf
The FEC's view
www.foodethicscouncil.org/node/115



Craig Sams

Craig Sams founded Green & Black's Organic Chocolate. He is President of Green & Black's Ltd. and Chair of the Soil Association. www.craigsams.com

Analysis: subsidies

Why do US farm payments matter worldwide?

The Doha round of trade negotiations has collapsed. Pascal Lamy, WTO Director General, calls the US "the biggest single block" to completion of the round.

Why is the US, the driving force of free trade, market forces and globalisation, the uncompromising obstacle to success in getting rid of subsidies? Why are US farmers called a powerful lobby when in fact they're welfare-dependent and disorganised, with very little real political power?

Subsidies to American farmers act as a tax on food producers worldwide because of the central position of the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) in setting food prices worldwide.

The benchmark prices for the world's main commodities are set on the CBOT. Every penny of subsidy on a US-grown commodity knocks one penny off the market price for that commodity. By artificially setting low prices for corn, soya, and cotton, all other feed, fat and textile commodity prices are rigged worldwide.

The total US subsidy to American farmers every year is \$150 billion. Because the markets are distorted, it's hard to say what level prices would rise to if subsidies were abandoned. But they would inevitably rise, by up to 50 percent, to the benefit of unsubsidised small farmers worldwide.

In today's 'real world' unsubsidised efficient farmers lose sales, lose their farms, lose their livelihoods.

Corn trades on the CBOT at 10¢ Kg – the market price at which a US farmer can scrape by is 16¢ per Kg. A 6¢ per Kg subsidy makes up the difference.

In Mexico hundreds of thousands of smallholding campesinos whose cost of production is about 13¢ per Kg have gone bankrupt and moved to Mexico City and the US in search of work. Why? Because they don't get a subsidy from the Mexican government. Subsidised US corn makes Mexican corn unsaleable in Mexico.

Why are US farmers called a powerful lobby when in fact they're welfare-dependent and disorganised?

As small farmers emigrate rural businesses go into decline and the rural infrastructure deteriorates. China now imports 1/3 of the US soybean crop (and lends the US \$400 billion a year). Result? Cheap chicken and pork for China's industrial work force, paid for by the US with borrowed money. As the oil price increases, the cost of fuel, fertilizer and pesticide will rise and the level of subsidies will have to rise accordingly.

So who gains from the US subsidy system? The leading global grain traders such as Cargill and ADM, industrial feedlots and confinement operations and the fast food chains. Subsidised corn sweeteners depress sugar prices so a cola and burger can sell for \$2. The healthy foods such as bread, whole grains, fish, vegetables and fruit, receive no subsidy – they are priced disadvantageously. Cheap fat and meat and sugary drinks lead to high levels of obesity. Subsidies cause diabetes.

In October 2005 Canada slapped a 6¢ per Kg Countervailing (CV) duty on imports of US corn to account for the hidden subsidy built into the price. The US fought it in the courts, but the principle is sound: if a country wishes to subsidise its farmers or specific crops, then they should be charged a CV duty on any exports of that crop. This then allows the world's markets to operate freely, without market manipulation that depresses commodity prices. The CBOT price for corn or soybeans would embody the CV factor and prices could come into the real world.

The collapse of the Doha round reflects the growing understanding and resentment among developing nations of how subsidies suppress market prices for their commodities. Bilateral agreements between the US and other countries will seek to sidestep the Doha process but will make the inevitable adjustment to reality even more painful. It's time to call a halt to the biggest market-rigging exercise since the Romans fixed the price of grain imports from their North African granaries.

What should happen now the Doha round has collapsed? Please tell us your views to include next issue. Our contact details are on the contents page.

More about

Chicago Board of Trade
www.cbtc.com

Home-grown horsepower

Can we farm fuel without wasting energy?

ON THE FARM



John Turner

When I saw BP's recent television advertising campaign signalling their backing for biofuels research my heart sank. Will this be yet another renaissance in one of farming's historic roles that gets re-branded as the next 'scientific revolution' – which experience shows means big corporate investment and a loss of autonomy for farmers?

The people who set the agenda for technological innovation in farming have their sights on global commodity markets. As such, they are unlikely to get excited by the view that developing biofuels could mean promoting a diverse range of affordable, practical, human-scale initiatives that include energy conservation and local production. Instead, we're likely to see biofuels give a new lease of life to oil tankers and the fossil-fuel network that they serve.

One of my father's earliest recollections is of sitting upon the last working horse used on our farm by my grandfather. Towards the end of the 1920s, the first tractor had been introduced to the farm, so instead of needing four horses they only needed the one – called Bonny.

The transition signalled a significant shift in land usage. Until then, a quarter of the land was used to produce feed for the horses – the sole motive power on the farm. There were of course by-products, such as manure, which were of further use to the farm and the horses were able to use grains and chaff that were unsuitable for sale. Nevertheless, 'releasing' a quarter of the land in order to produce crops for sale must have seemed a significant step forward. In retrospect, however, it marked the point at which energy supplies were externalised from the farm's own resources. It was a move from sustainable to unsustainable, and from renewable forms of energy to a dependence on fossil fuels and lubricants.

If the recent interest in biofuels does bring with it a shift in farming patterns back to one where a proportion of the land is used to supply the motive power for the inputs to the farm, I wonder how far technological advances will have brought us from the 25 percent used in my grandfather's days. Oilseed rape is able to deliver a ratio of energy input to energy output of anywhere between 0.35 and 0.86. My own (rather less sophisticated) calculation based on

the working practices of contemporary arable farmers in the area suggests a range of figures that agrees with the upper end of this scale – it takes about 80 litres of fossil fuel to generate every 100 litres of bio-diesel and in some cases it actually takes more fuel to grow, dry, transport and process the crop than it yields.

In any farming system that relies on draught animals to provide the power to cultivate and harvest, having the source of production and point of use within the same area of land and under the same business leads to a very simple equation – the greater the energy used in production, the less land is available to grow cash crops and therefore the less profitable the business. Nowadays, the sources of energy required for inputs and outputs are remote and the relationship between the two is far more tenuous. It is easy to become transfixed by the potential output from biofuels and to miss the crucial factor, which is the net gain or loss of energy resources within the whole cycle.

For all the technological innovation since English farmers relied on working horses, production increases have seen us rely on more energy to produce agricultural inputs such as fertilizers and crop sprays, transport, processing and the machinery needed to drive today's patterns of farming. This is no plea to return to the horse, but recalling how our grandparents farmed can remind us that farming fuel is far from new and that it is how we do it – particularly the scale, the efficiency and who is in control – that really matters.



appointing new COUNCIL MEMBERS

Deadline for applications: 22nd September 2006

The Food Ethics Council is expanding and seeks four new members in addition to the current twelve. The aim is to increase the breadth of knowledge and experience represented on the Council, further improving the organisation's capacity to make a positive contribution to decision-making about food and farming.

To find out more or to apply please visit www.foodethicscouncil.org/jobs/newmembers or call Tom MacMillan on +44 (0) 1273 766 654.



David Goodman

David Goodman is Professor of Environmental Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz. hatters@ucsc.edu

Analysis: coffee

Secret worlds – the hidden crisis in your latte

TAKE ONE:

In 2005, 464 illegal immigrants died attempting to cross the Arizona desert in search of a better future. Roughly one-third of the 1.5 million illegal immigrants detained by the US Border Patrol last year were caught on Arizona's 350-mile border with Mexico.

TAKE TWO:

An unknown number of these migrants are coffee workers and smallholders from southern Mexico and Central America, driven from their mountain villages by the unprecedented collapse of international coffee prices since 2000. In real terms, world prices have touched depths not witnessed for over a century, provoking a rural livelihood crisis in the coffee regions of Mesoamerica, where most coffee growers are smallholders and 65 percent are indigenous peoples.

Arizona's rise to macabre prominence thus has coincided with sharply increasing levels of unemployment, poverty and infant malnutrition, undermining the cohesion of families and communities throughout Mesoamerica. Millions of coffee farmers elsewhere in the global South are trapped in the same desperate circumstances.

TAKE THREE:

In his forthcoming book, *Brewing Justice* (University of California Press), Daniel Jaffee writes about the Zapotec coffee farmers in the village of Yagavila, Mexico, perched 2000 feet high in the Sierra Juárez mountains and an eight-hour bus-ride from the city of Oaxaca, the state capital. Through their local cooperative, these growers export certified fair trade and organic coffee, maintaining a connection with global markets that extends back over much of the twentieth century. However, although such certified 'sustainable coffee' commands premium prices,

demand is limited, forcing growers to sell the bulk of their harvest in the severely depressed conventional market. With cost inflation further eroding earnings, Yagavila has become a 'sending point' as coffee farmers migrate to urban centres such as Mexico City or join the historic exodus to *El Norte*. Jaffee estimates that 285 people, 45 percent of Yagavila's population, migrated between 1999 and mid-2003, including 49 heads of household and 38 entire families. Of these people, 73 are now in the United States, a migratory destination of virtually no importance in this area before 1999.

World coffee prices have touched depths not witnessed for over a century

TAKE FOUR:

The mid-morning coffee 'rush' is well underway as young professionals, commuters and 'soccer moms' take time out from their busy day, chat with the barista, sip a cappuccino or latte, and relax in the comfort of armchairs. There is a respectful buzz of conversation, with Miles Davis's "Kind of Blue" adding plaintive notes of edgy sophistication. Welcome to the creative realm of symbolic value, where lifestyle choices are designed, coffee drinkers distanced from places of production, and transnational corporations reap huge profits. This is the strategic part of the coffee chain – from bean to cup – which the farmers of countless Yagavilas never reach. It is where a generic commodity is magically transformed into many differentiated products, each bearing a heavily publicized brand name and promising social cachet.

TAKE FIVE:

No, not the gentle syncopation of Dave Brubeck, but the harsh ring of cash registers. The vast gulf between the low price of green beans on the trading exchanges in New York and London, of which coffee growers receive under 10 percent, and the hugely inflated cost of a cup of coffee defines the *Coffee paradox*, the title of a recent book by Benoit Daviron and Stefano Ponte. Some 25 million coffee growers produce green beans for the world market, which are sold by a handful of trading companies to an even smaller group of powerful transnational corporations – Nestlé, Philip Morris, Sara Lee, Procter & Gamble, and Tchibo – who control 69 percent of the global roasted and instant coffee markets.

TAKE SIX:

The coffee price crisis in the Global South is a crisis of governance. With the demise in 1989 of the International Coffee Agreement, which had stabilized world prices using export quotas, producing countries lost leverage in the global politics of coffee, leaving the market power of transnational roasting companies unchecked.

The illegal immigrants from the disintegrating coffee communities of Mesoamerica facing the Arizona desert are the unheard and unseen actors in this unfolding, neoliberal drama. In this actually existing neoliberalization, the abstraction of market forces – read oligopolistic transnationals – is revealed in all of its tragic consequences. Coffee drinkers in the global North have yet to uncover these secret, remorseless worlds of coffee, both near and far.

Making ethical performance visible

More compulsory disclosure is in the public interest

CAPITAL CONCERNS



Nick Robins

Markets famously work on the basis of 'perfect information', whereby rational economic actors make choices on the basis of all available facts. We know, of course, that reality is nothing like this ideal model, with consumers, companies and citizens having to cope with insufficient and inadequate data upon which to make 'satisficing' rather than 'optimising' decisions. In particular, we know that social, ethical and environmental (SEE) information is still rarely available in a form that can move markets. In spite of over two decades of steadily improving corporate reporting, sustainability remains invisible to financial analysts.

The main weakness of current disclosure practices lies in the distinction between what can be called 'soft' and 'hard' data. Financial markets respond with alacrity to 'hard data' about corporate revenues, costs and earnings, and here fines for malpractice (if large enough) along with taxes for health or environmental reasons are quickly digested and incorporated into the valuation of companies on the world's stock markets. The EU Emissions Trading Scheme is a case in point, where the creation of a regulated market – however imperfect – has managed to create awareness of the costs of carbon in ways that endless exhortations by environment ministers never could.

Sadly, however, most environmental and social disclosure sits in the camp of 'soft data', qualitative information that is generally not comparable or easily linked through to the core drivers of business performance. Thus, when Shell misstated the extent of its oil reserves in January 2005, its share-price plummeted and the group subsequently suffered a combined \$151 million fine from the US Securities and Exchange Commission and the UK's Financial Services Authority. But when BP released its 2005 Sustainability Report and more than halved the estimated greenhouse gas emissions of its goods and services, from 1,376 million tonnes to just 606 million tonnes for 2004, the market didn't move a muscle. In part this was due to the simple fact that few mainstream investors ever read sustainability reports. But more fundamentally, it stemmed from the fact that this area of corporate performance was still externalised, so performance had no bearing on financial results.

This tension between 'hard' and 'soft' data has also emerged in the struggles over corporate reporting in the UK government's Company

Law Review. Taking as its starting point the concept of 'enlightened shareholder value', the government was keen to make companies produce more extensive operating and financial reviews (OFR) to enable investors to take a more strategic view of business prospects. As part of the OFR, non-financial factors, such as pollution and employee relations, would be considered, but only where they impinged in a 'material' way on the future of the business. Into this essentially functional approach, however, was inserted the over-lapping, but quite separate agenda of CSR reporting for a wider set of stakeholders. The OFR was thus made the vehicle to realise the government's long-standing commitment to regulate for improved environmental disclosure if voluntary reporting had not improved (which it hadn't). But the OFR simply could not carry this dual agenda, and when the first signs of a business backlash hit the government, the Chancellor scrapped the mandatory OFR and the accompanying accounting standard, prompting a successful challenge from Friends of the Earth.

The final shape of the OFR is still to be decided in Parliament this year, but the lessons of this experience need to inform that next phase of work to make social, environmental and ethical disclosure matter in financial markets. One fundamental lesson is that 'enlightened shareholder interest' is not enough to generate the kind of reporting that is needed to hold corporations accountable to society at large. Voluntary reporting has proved itself useful to encourage experimentation and testing. But if an issue of corporate performance is sufficiently significant for the public interest, then it should be regulated as such and disclosure made compulsory. Climate change is a prime example, where voluntary initiatives such as the Carbon Disclosure Project have built up a body of experience that should now be hard-wired into stock market regulation. A similar prioritised approach could be taken for nutrition, where a recent study by City University concluded from an in-depth review of corporate disclosure that "the world's food companies are not yet fully engaged with the seriousness and urgency" of the transformation to healthy diets that is now required. The flipside of this, of course, is that not every SEE issue can be a priority, making it imperative that the CSR reporting industry develop greater discipline and focus in what they call for. In this way, the veil of secrecy that currently masks the importance of sustainability could at last be removed.

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Analysis: green living

Buying food that is good for people and planet

Back in 1970, when I took my 6-week-old daughter to an organic farm for a working fortnight (known as woofing – working on organic farms), I had no idea where else my Green values would take me.

Like millions of others, I had read Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* which came out in 1962, so I was more worried about pesticides than climate change, hence the woofing.

There did seem to be real concern and positive things appeared to be happening. In 1970, we celebrated Earth Day, the Clean Air Act, and the founding of the Environmental Protection Agency. Two years later, in 1972, the use of DDT was banned in the United States. Then in 1973, *Small is beautiful* was published (luckily after I had had both my children) and started many of us on the new worry of excessive population growth and an imminent shortage of global resources.

Although the problems appeared massive, it also seemed that we could at least clean up our own food acts, by growing our own food or by supporting organic producers, many of whom had simply never gone the pesticide/intensive farming route. It was very much a niche market. Now, the value of the UK organic food market is huge and growing fast. Sales have almost trebled over the past five years, from less than £400m in 1998 to £1.2 billion this year. By 2007 the value of the UK market is expected to reach £1.6 billion.

So, thirty years later and a bit wiser, we baby boomers can see that the stakes are higher and the solutions much more complicated. We care about the planet, but we also care about our own ageing bodies and what we put into them. We know the chickens for sale in supermarkets and many restaurants are

probably produced abroad, in appalling hygiene and animal welfare conditions, and possibly by workers who are badly paid. Much better for everyone to buy hand-reared, well-nurtured British organic birds that taste better too. But it gets harder to decide on some foods.

For example, if we do a Q&A on what's best for the planet, local versus organic:

QUESTION:

Should we buy local non-organic apples, or organic ones from South Africa?

ANSWER:

Probably the local apples, if truly local and not trundled all over the UK in and out of distribution centres before being sold, as so much supermarket produce is.

That was an easy one. What about ...

QUESTION:

Should we buy wine from France or Spain transported by lorry, or from New Zealand or Chile by boat?

ANSWER:

Probably the boat-shipped wine, as the lorries are more polluting per item per mile.

And what about supporting other poorer countries?

QUESTION:

Is it OK to buy out of season vegetables from places like Kenya because it supports the local farmers?

ANSWER:

Probably not, as the food is likely to have been grown on land owned by agribusinesses in intensive conditions, which means that local people are priced out of the land market and can hardly grow enough for themselves. They might also be used as cheap labour in

unhealthy conditions, for example being unprotected from spraying.

So we have to throw fair trade into the mix, for foods that we simply can't grow for ourselves like coffee and bananas, or for unseasonal foods we can't give up. In 2004, sales of products carrying the Fairtrade mark topped £140m and amongst the 20 countries across Europe, North America, Japan and Australia/New Zealand and Mexico that make up FLO (Fairtrade Labelling Organisations International), the UK has the largest Fairtrade market.

Results of the many market research surveys conducted over the last few years by MORI indicate that there is growing awareness of, and potential demand for, Fairtrade certified products. A MORI survey in May 2005 found that 50 percent of the UK adult population can now identify the certification mark, up from 25 percent in 2003 and 39 percent last year. A quick canvass of this August-depleted office (three staff, all below thirty) showed that two out of three think that the issue of fair trade is more important than organic production.

All this agonising over which item is greener and more sustainable than the next does mean that I spend a ridiculous amount of time looking at labels, which I find a useful deterrent against buying processed food – fresh food is simpler in not having additives to check. My own buying hierarchy, starting at the top, is to buy fresh, buy local, buy organic, buy fair trade and finally, if you can't resist that ready made pizza or cream cake, buy whatever strikes your fancy.

Suppressing science

Good regulation thrives on public scrutiny

LETTER FROM INDIA



Devinder Sharma

Sample the following: Scientists at the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) say they feel pressure to alter their work for non-scientific reasons and to provide misleading information. In the UK, genetically modified crops can be grown in secret. Farmers are under no obligation to notify the owners of nearby gardens, allotments or beehives that they were growing GM crops.

Suppressing facts is the new international scientific mantra. It is being increasingly legalised the world over by a more than eager bureaucracy and polity. In few areas is this more apparent than genetic modification (GM).

Point a finger at any flaw in GM technology, and the government, academia and the scientific community are sure to rise as one. The media is quick to join the chorus debunking criticism as 'illogical' opposition to technological advance. "There is risk in everything that we do," is the common refrain. "You can be knocked down by a speeding car, the roof can fall on you while you are sleeping, and you can even die falling from your bed," scientists and technologists tell you.

The cutting-edge technology that is now being commercially promoted relates to the genetic manipulation of living organisms. Dubbed as 'substantially equivalent' to naturally occurring organisms, genetically modified plants are being pushed in the name of eradicating hunger and malnutrition. More importantly, we are given the impression that these plants and food products are perfectly safe for human health and the environment. Any untoward criticism is therefore unjustified. Those who raise questions become victims of a universal slander and smear campaign perpetuated by an agitated scientific community.

Highly acclaimed scientific bodies and organizations, and that includes Britain's Royal Society and a number of Nobel laureates, have succumbed to industry pressure to support untested claims about the human and environmental safety of GM plants/foods. In reality, an American court has found serious flaws in FDA safety regulations. The Alliance for Bio-Integrity, in May 1998, said that a case it filed in a Washington, DC court "demonstrated the irresponsibility of FDA policy and the falsity

of some of the major claims made in support of GE [genetically engineered] foods." And yet the world is being increasingly told that since the FDA has done the safety testing there is no need to worry.

During the course of the hearings, internal files of the FDA showed that "the predominant opinion of the agency's own scientific experts was that GE foods have unique health risks". These experts had repeatedly cautioned their superiors about these risks. Numerous statements from the FDA's own scientists warning about potential unintended harmful side effects and criticising the lack of a scientific basis for the FDA's policy were brushed aside. The FDA's own team of experts had informed their seniors (all political appointees) about the kind of tests required to know, for instance, the impact on human health and safety based on long-term toxicological feeding studies. But their warnings were invariably turned down. The bureaucrats had a mandate to promote genetically modified products and they did it regardless of human health concerns.

That was in 1998. And yet no lessons have been learnt. A briefing paper by the Institute for Social Ecology points to glaring oversights in federal procedures that do not address potential environmental, human health, and economic consequences of experimental genetically engineered crops. In developing countries, and that includes China and India, the regulatory authorities have degenerated into an official rubber stamp to uphold the commercial interests of powerful biotechnology companies.

In India, recent reports that over a thousand sheep died after grazing in Bt cotton fields in Andhra Pradesh, prompted the industry, scientists and the bureaucracy to tamper with hospital records and post-mortem results so as to erase evidence. The Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) – the apex regulatory body – has finally brushed aside the reports instead of seeking a scientific inquest.

Suppressing facts is like driving a nail in the coffin of good science.

Devinder Sharma is a New Delhi-based food and trade policy analyst. Among his recent works include two books: *GATT to WTO – Seeds of Despair* and *In the Famine Trap*. www.dsharma.org

Sshhh... Let the seeds sleep

Government hopes to keep quiet that Terminator technology is back

Patrick Mulvany
says it is
time to make
some noise

A creeping threat to life on Earth will be released in our lifetimes, without most people being aware until it is too late. The fertility of the seeds that feed us will be progressively eroded in the interests of corporate profit; seed saving, the source of the diversity of the foods we eat, will be history.

It has been through the free exchange of seeds over millennia between communities, countries and continents that myriad varieties of our food crops, suited to every social need, economic opportunity and multifunctional agroecosystem, have been developed by farmers. In only the last century, with the advent of intensive, industrial farming, has this diversity been eroded – 75 percent of farmers' varieties have been lost – as modern seed varieties have squeezed out the old, tasty, nutritious bedrock of our food and farming system.

Transnational plant breeding corporations, in their desire to control and increase the sale of their seeds, are finding ways to enforce 'protection' of what, they assert, is their proprietary technology embodied in seeds. Of course, most of that 'technology' is in fact derived from the genes that farmers had selected and included in their own varieties. The corporations have merely appropriated the traits they wanted and incorporated them into modern varieties.

Patents and plant breeders' rights aren't sufficient protection, the companies claim, since farmers can often get around these legal controls and re-use farm-saved seed. So, they are developing a genetic modification technology that will prevent farm-saved seed from germinating properly, ensuring that farmers will have to buy new seeds each season. It would put an end to the seed saving that is essential for food production among the majority of poor farmers and desired by many others who

want to retain and improve varieties on their own farms.

This has been dubbed 'Terminator technology'. It is a Genetic Use Restriction Technology (GURT) – in other words, it limits a farmer's use of the seed to a specific purpose determined by the corporation. The crippling trait that is most often cited is seed sterility to ensure the seed cannot be saved, but equally the technology could be used to increase or reduce pest and disease resistance. Terminator technology confers enormous powers on the seed corporations, which they will use to expand a market that they already dominate – the top 10 seed companies control half of the world's commercial seed sales. Governments have a duty to limit these powers in the public interest.

In the words of Anthony Steen MP, who led the adjournment debate on Terminator technology in the House of Commons on 8th March, "...the technology is designed to ensure greater profits for seed manufacturers by requiring new seeds to be purchased annually. However, the seed industry should not be painted as the villain in this picture. ... they are commercial businesses that have a duty to their shareholders and employees to make profits... [T]he decision on what technology is acceptable is properly the remit of elected representatives in parliaments such as this, and of governments. It is governments' responsibility, not the companies', to determine the appropriate use of innovative and controversial technology."

There have been dynamic international and national campaigns to prevent the development of this particular technology. Campaigns have targeted national governments, calling on them to ban or to implement a moratorium on the release of



Terminator. Some governments have called for an outright international ban on its development, testing and use. Many international organisations in the UN system, agricultural research institutions and churches have supported this view.

As a result of all this pressure, the corporations have sent mixed messages. Some have said they would not seek to develop sterile seed technologies on food crops but would keep researching the options for other crops and for traits other than sterility.

The locus of the international reaction against Terminator is the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). At the Conference of the Parties (COP) in the year 2000, governments agreed that GURTs were a class of GMOs apart from others and needed specific regulation. As such, they agreed that there should be global socio-economic assessments of the technology before GURTs can be released into the environment, with further tests before it can be commercialised. This position was reaffirmed in March this year at the 8th COP in Curitiba, Brazil, after a massive lobby by farmers who were outraged that their rights to save seed

would be compromised by Terminator. This despite some countries conniving to overturn the de facto moratorium. They wanted the CBD to give discretion to individual governments to permit the release of the technology, within their own country or region, based only on scientific case-by-case assessments and without reference to global environmental and socio-economic impacts. Eventually, they agreed, as a compromise, to keep to the existing position.

Yet, the UK government now tells us that they will assess any application on purely scientific grounds and on a case-by-case basis. Lord Rooker, DEFRA minister, in reply to a letter from the UK Food Group (19th July) said: "...the onus is on parties to decide what scientific assessments on ecological and socio-economic impacts are appropriate. The UK and EU approach on GM issues has always been to take a precautionary and case-by-case view... [and] GURTs would be dealt with in the same way as any other GMO." Assessments of socio-economic impacts, they assert, are not considered appropriate to Europe and are not, anyway, included in the approval system agreed under EC Directive 2001/18

on the deliberate release into the environment of GMOs.

So what's the secret? Not much of a secret really, but it seems that government can negotiate international agreements with its fingers crossed behind its back. When it comes to implementation, it can cherry-pick the bits it likes and re-interpret the bits it doesn't like in ways that will further special interests. There seems to be no intention to change UK or EU regulations, directives or law in the light of the CBD decision. In the words of Michael Meacher, the former Environment Minister at the time of the original decision in 2000, "Without internationally accepted assessments of impacts, and globally-binding rules, poor southern countries would struggle to withstand pressure from biotechnology companies to license terminator seeds. Is this DEFRA's ulterior motive?"¹

Maybe. If the Executive is not fit for purpose in defending the public interest through implementing international decisions that could prevent significant negative impacts on people or the environment, then parliament has to take back control. The 256 MPs who signed the Early Day Motion (EDM 1300) on Terminator technology should now be challenging DEFRA to explain how countries, especially poorer ones, could defend themselves against this devastating technology, if some of the signatories to the CBD agreement can simply wink and walk away, leaving the seeds to sleep forever.

¹ Guardian 15 March 2006.



Michele Field

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Analysis: food quality

'Lookism' and perfect fruit

It is illegal in the UK to advertise for a secretary who has long legs and a pretty face, and from October it is even illegal to specify an age-range. But the laws against 'lookist' prejudices in people selection are reversed when it comes to fruit selection.

At present the government has entirely 'lookist' standards in 45 fruits and vegetables that judge a piece of Nature entirely by size, colour and typical shape – not by the smell at the stem-end of the fruit, not by its weight in the hand relative to its size, not by the 'squeeze' that shoppers everywhere in the world seem to do the same way. In the West the shopper's judgment has atrophied because 'Perfection' is now reducible. The forces against 'Imperfection' are stifling diversity, forcing fruit-growers in other cultures to conform to an idea of perfection that's not their own if they want to export to us, and turning farming into a science of appearances.

On June 19th Waitrose announced that it would sell Grade II fruit in cheaper large-lots called "Not Quite Perfect". Waitrose said that, actually, the taste of "Not Quite Perfect" produce remained as perfect as Grade I fruit – indeed, it's from the same crops, the same farms, "the only difference being that it may be slightly misshapen or slightly bruised". But instead of wanting consumers to accept that variations in appearance are natural, and acknowledging that a reduction of the shameful volume of food-waste in Britain depends on *changing attitudes* about so-called 'misshapeness', Waitrose has clung to the same old spurious standards.

My attempts to discuss the implications of this situation with a Waitrose fruit buyer failed because "he is not media trained," his Spa Way press agent told me. The Q&A by email was banal. I turned to the equivalent people at Marks and Spencer, and Hugh Mowat, the senior agronomist there, said that although M&S will not venture, like Waitrose, into selling Class II fruit, he did think that Class I and II distinctions belonged to another era. They "were invented as a trading standards quality guarantee to protect customers in the days when wholesale markets dominated the supply of the nation's food. ... Arguably these standards are outdated for supermarkets where product specifications are set and monitored. The standards are still valid and useful for the catering trade who continue to buy from wholesale markets."

Why sustain them for ordinary shoppers' purchases? This query to Waitrose was answered: "Waitrose has simply followed EU standards".

On April 1st of this year, the responsibility for this Class I and Class II distinction moved out of Defra into the Rural Payments Agency (RPA). These crude I and II classifications are explained on the RPA website as relying on:

- The Agriculture and Horticulture Act 1964
- The Grading of Horticultural Produce... etc. 1982
- The Horticultural Produce Act 1986
- The amendment to 1986 in 1973

Sorry, but now we are now *half a century* from the intentions of this legislation. We see how food-waste in Britain begins with the 'sorting' that occurs between the farm and the retailer. As Ian Hewett of the RPA explains, as an example, "In Class I apples the fruit can only have a maximum of 1 cm squared of skin defects and 1 cm squared of light bruise. In Class II they can have up to 2.5 cm squared of skin defects and 1.5 cm squared of bruising that can be discoloured." And our taxes are paying for these assessments!

RPA inspector Lauren Harris, to her credit, says that the situation is changing. "Most organic fruit and vegetables are labelled as Class II as often they show imperfections in appearance due to irregular shape or defects such as slight pest damage." Of course: so some of us are willing to pay more for Class II fruit when it has other assets.

I am certainly not opposed to Waitrose selling symmetrical tomatoes at £2.48/kg and others, good for pasta sauce, at £1.98/kg. When it comes Waitrose's wider price-difference in plums (£3.98/kg vs £2.99/kg), I am even more enthusiastic, as anybody who has cooked plums will appreciate. But actually, I am going to *eat* the £2.99/kg plums fresh as well – just as, I hope, I would hire a weedy-looking man as a secretary.

More about

The RPA standards
www.rpa.gov.uk/rpa/index.nsf/UIDMenu/6332FD65A87EFA178025712A00439A33?Opendocument



Sue Haddleton

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Analysis: processing

Will greater traceability put a stop to secrecy?

The food industry relies on secrecy. Companies are under pressure to make two sleights of hand at once: to manufacture an illusion for consumers of food processing that leaves out the nasty bits and, meanwhile, to be economical with the truth in their dealings with other companies up and down the supply chain.

The conventional wisdom is that consumers are more knowledgeable and demanding these days and that they will become still more so. Yet much still gets hidden not only from consumers, but also from the regulatory authorities and among companies themselves. In the current climate where retailers dominate the supply chain and foods are sourced globally, the pressures behind this secrecy are becoming ever more important. When we eat any food we take a leap of faith: the greater the human input and the more cut-throat the market, the greater the leap.

Having worked as a buyer in the food sector I've experienced this phenomenon from several angles. For instance, it used to puzzle me how perfect canned grapefruit segments were – when I tried to remove the membrane myself they would always fall to pieces. Later I got the chance to visit a factory that made them and was shocked to find that they were dipped in caustic soda to remove the membrane and then washed. That is why they looked so perfect.

I also discovered that the bits in orange juice "with bits in" are not necessarily from the same oranges as the juice. Instead they can come from frozen pulp, a by-product of another process.

Another time I was told by the sales director of a flavourings company that crisp manufacturers added a much higher

dose of flavouring when they launch a new variety, so the consumer gets a real 'hit' when they first buy it. After the product is established and has achieved some loyalty, the flavouring is reduced.

On the face of it, the growing emphasis on traceability in the food sector promises to call time on food processing practices that might shock consumers. In fact, though, traceability isn't much about being transparent to consumers. It is more about shifting the balance of knowledge and market power from one part of the sector to another.

As consumers we're complicit in commercial secrecy, at least to a point

So, while the idea of knowing where your food comes from – by having details and pictures of the farm on your meat packaging, for instance – is increasingly marketed to consumers, the concept of traceability has been around in the food business for a good while. It helps during product recalls and it can be a powerful lever in business-to-business negotiations.

Indeed, instead of reducing secrecy and giving consumers a strong guarantee of the quality of their food, greater traceability may see companies continue to process food in questionable ways but simply do so more covertly. After all, traceability increases the squeeze on them from further up the supply chain that leads them to do things they would rather consumers did not know.

While I think secrecy is a big problem, I don't want to lay all the blame for it on industry. Food companies are under

immense pressure to do what they can get away with, and without big shifts in the structure of the food sector, and in its regulation, that isn't going to change. What's more, as consumers we're complicit in this secrecy, at least to a point. We may play along with not preparing our own food and not wanting to know too much about how it is processed because we feel too squeamish, too busy, or because we don't feel equipped to cook.

But only to a point. These consumer 'preferences' and trends are themselves heavily influenced by marketing. Take our hectic lifestyles, said to be driving the consumer trend towards convenience. For my money, the reason our beans come topped and tailed owes more to fact that it cuts industry freight costs than because most of us really have better things to do with the few seconds it saves. We'll go along with the fiction that we're too busy to cook – we'll even pay for it – because it makes us feel important.

So secrecy is crucial weapon in the battle for consumers' minds and wallets. Greater traceability won't see the end of it, even if it does force the sector to regroup. Food companies make money from us becoming dependent – from consumers deferring to them the task of preparing food. If we knew more about how food was processed, I doubt we'd be so ready to buy the idea that we're too busy to cook.

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The language of government

Does calling citizens 'stakeholders' give them any more power?

SECOND THOUGHT



Jo Murphy-Lawless

The board game Monopoly was one of my least favourite games when I was a child. I especially disliked it when a player was driven to the edge of complete pauperdom. It felt horribly cruel, even if it followed the rules of the game.

It was only as an adult that I learned the story of the origins of Monopoly before it was marketed on a mass scale. The story confirmed my child's instinct about its lack of fairness. The original version was invented by a Philadelphia Quaker, Lizzie Magie. She wanted a more equitable property tax structure in the United States to prevent speculation of land values and to reflect fairly in taxes paid the more advantageous circumstances of landlords, compared with those who remained renters. She used the game to illustrate the existing lack of equity at that time.

The conventional board game appears to present a 'level playing field' on which each player has an equal chance to make his or her own luck. Perhaps only if you know the logic of how monopolistic positions are consolidated can you understand that this is not a game that ends well for all players, but only for the most powerful.

For me, the role given to ordinary citizens as 'stakeholders' is another version of Monopoly. When our governments formally announce a consultation exercise with 'stakeholders', where all interests can be identified and considered, or even when they announce a series of informal consultations, these appear on the level and the immediate rules of participation seem to be clear. In fact, more powerful figures quickly emerge and come to the table with a far more influential voice.

An example of this comes from the FMD epidemic of 2001. While small farmers in Devon and Cumbria struggled with court actions to prevent contiguous culling from taking place and wiping out their livelihoods, it was revealed six months into the epidemic that the agribusiness food lobby, including the giant international producer, Nestlé, had met with the government some time earlier and objected strenuously even to a limited programme of vaccination for those hard-hit areas. Nestlé voiced particular concerns about its powdered milk exports should vaccination proceed.

Can we be confident that all interests were identified, and all points of view equally taken into account before decisions were made, and that decisions were just and equitable?

In fact, this example illustrates several features of contemporary government. David Harvey, the social theorist who has written extensively on states in the neoliberal era, observes that governments favour a pattern of decision-making about public policies that incorporates a close and often secretive consultation with expert and elite groups at the expense of a more inclusive society-wide process. This is a distinctive structural change in government that now more often prefers executive order to parliamentary debate. Democracy under these conditions is becoming something of a 'luxury', Harvey argues.

How much use to civil society is this notion of the stakeholder then? Perhaps it is helpful to examine the original meaning of the term, where contested property or monies were held by a third party, the stakeholder, until the dispute was resolved. This is a sharp reminder that being a stakeholder is associated with a contest over resources.

The issue is whether we can strengthen the terms of reference for stakeholding to include a high-intensity version of democratic participation where voices really do count equally. This is quite a challenge, as Harvey observes, where the boundaries between state power and corporate power become ever more porous. With the engagement sketched by Harvey, this game of being a stakeholder is not for the fainthearted.



NEXT ISSUE: THE BOTTOM LINE

In the Winter '06 bulletin: Poverty, markets and the ethics of economic decision-making about food. Subscribe now to receive your copy using the form on the inside front cover.

NEWS

reading



Road pricing, whereby motorists are charged according to their use of roads, is central to the UK government's transport strategy, and a nation-wide system is possible within the next ten years. Over the summer, plans were announced to introduce pilot schemes from next year.

This could make a big difference to the way food is transported and it could encourage more sustainable food systems. How far it does so, however, hangs in the balance – the environmental and social outcomes of road pricing will depend heavily on how the government weights various aims such as tackling congestion and reducing pollution.

In September the Food Ethics Council is beginning a project, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, which aims to harness the potential of road pricing to promote sustainable food systems by ensuring that the effects of road pricing on food distribution are fully taken into account in the design of UK schemes. A newly-appointed Research Fellow, Paul Steedman, will be working on this project.

Advertising to children

Ofcom, the broadcast regulator, is deciding how to restrict TV food advertising to children. To the surprise and displeasure of the Food Standards Agency, health charities and children's groups, its recent consultation paper ruled out as 'disproportionate' the package of regulatory measures that would deliver the biggest health benefits.

The Food Ethics Council responded to the consultation. In addition, our staff had a letter published in *The Grocer* and a comment in *The Glasgow Herald*. We asked what Ofcom meant by 'disproportionate', since the consultation paper itself did little to explain.

Even giving the regulator every benefit of the doubt, it was hard to find any respect in which the disadvantages of banning ads for highly fatty, sugary and salty foods before the 9pm watershed would outweigh the benefits. And at any rate, we concluded, behind the figures on costs and benefits are real children with real health problems and with rights that the broadcaster is obliged to respect.

Appointing new members

The members of the Food Ethics Council bring a broad range of expertise to our work, from academic research through to practical knowledge of farming, business and policy. We are expanding the Council and seek four new members in addition to the current twelve. Our aim is to increase the breadth of knowledge and experience represented on the Council, and improve our capacity to make a positive contribution to decision-making about food and farming.

The vacancies have been advertised and we invite applications and nominations for membership. If you would like further information please contact our office at the address on the Contents page or visit www.foodethicscouncil.org/jobs/newmembers.

Apicius: a critical introduction
Christopher Grocock & Sally Grainger (translation and commentary) | 2006 | Prospect Books

Apicius was a real man, but the advice on food and recipes that bear the name 'Apicius' are the Homeric Odyssey of Western food, relying on several authors. The long introduction by these two lively English scholars touches on food issues in the Roman world, BC. MF

Bad food Britain: how a nation ruined its appetite
Joanna Blythman | 2006 | Fourth Estate
A dressing-down for our weird and not-so-wonderful food habits, delivered with considerable gusto and good humour. TM

Bread matters: the sorry state of modern bread and a definitive guide to baking your own
Andrew Whitley | 2006 | Harper Collins

A much-awaited book about exactly what makes ready-made bread so bland and nutritionally poor. The population eats half as much bread as it did 45 years ago – and with these explanations you may appreciate why. MF

Buying, not cooking: ready-to-eat food in American urban working-class neighborhoods, 1880-1930

Katherine Leonard Turner | Spring 2006 | *Food, Culture & Society* 9 (1)
As an antidote to the argument that only today are working people depending on ready-meals, the author shows it happened before. The alternatives to home-cooking were as wide at the turn of the century as they are now. MF

Campesino a campesino: voices from Latin America's farmer to farmer movement for sustainable agriculture
Eric Holt-Gimenez | 2006 | Food First

A fascinating and moving book about grassroots innovation and solidarity in the face of violence and poverty. The format, mixing the author's analysis with first-hand accounts from movement members, makes it particularly engaging. TM

Consuming cultures, global perspectives
John Brewer & Frank Trentmann (eds.) | 2006 | Berg

This book offers some erudite insights into consumption around the world, though chewing gum and binge drinking are the closest most chapters get to food. TM

Culinary cultures of Europe: identity, diversity and dialogue
Darra Goldstein & Kathrin Merkle (eds.) | 2005 | Council of Europe Publishing

The is the only food-focussed book that the Council of Europe has ever published, which reflects the fact that the CoE barely grapples with Europe's food issues. However, the country-by-country chapters are a good guide to the diversity of taste. MF

Fat politics: the real story behind America's obesity epidemic
J. Eric Oliver | 2006 | Oxford University Press

An American professor of political science has interesting theories about obesity – not from a medical perspective, not even as a 'problem', but as a social phenomenon. MF

Global biodiversity outlook 2
Secretariat of the CBD | 2006 | www.biodiv.org

A primer, a polemic and an authoritative point of reference on global biodiversity. It reviews the current state of play and analyses trends that will shape the future – packed with information and illustrations. TM

Implementing the precautionary principle: perspectives and prospects
Elizabeth Fisher, Judith Jones & René von Schomberg (eds.) | 2006 | Edward Elgar

Contributors to this 350-page collection include some of the leading thinkers on regulatory science and public engagement from the UK and around the world. TM

Sociological perspectives of organic agriculture: from pioneer to policy
Georgina Holt & Matt Reed (eds.) | 2006 | CABI

An academic collection with chapters covering many aspects of organic farming on all arable continents, from a wide range of social sciences. TM

The corporation that changed the world: how the East India Company shaped the modern multinational
Nick Robins | 2006 | Pluto Press

An engrossing and thorough account of the emergence and downfall of a company that gave birth to words, practices and institutions that still shape our lives today. Working in the City of London, bulletin contributor Nick Robins detects legacies that others would miss. TM

upcoming events

2nd – 9th Sept '06

The BA Festival of Science

The BA | www.the-ba.net | Norwich, UK

3rd – 7th Sept '06

Agricultural Engineering for a Better World

CIGR, EurAgEng, VDI-MEG and FAO | www.2006cigr.org | Bonn, Germany

11th Sept '06

Food Poverty – Acting Local, Thinking National

University of Westminster | ebishop@essex.ac.uk | London, UK

13rd – 15th Sept '06

Quality of Life: The Heart of the Matter

UFAW | www.ufaw.org.uk | London, UK

14th Sept '06

Obesity in the EU: Evaluating the Options

PorGrow | www.sussex.ac.uk/porgrow | Brussels, Belgium

17th – 21st Sept '06

Food is Life: 13th World Congress of Food Science & Technology

IUFoST | www.inra.fr/iufost2006 | Nantes, France

18th – 20th Sept '06

What Will Organic Farming Deliver?

Colloquium of Organic Researchers, Heriot-Watt University | www.aab.org.uk | Edinburgh, UK

20th Sept '06

Ethical Traceability in the Food Chain

food-ethics.net | www.food-ethics.net | Brussels, Belgium

23rd – 27th Sept '06

Nutrition Congress: Surfing for Knowledge

NSSA, SAAFOST, ADSA | www.nutritioncongress.co.za | Port Elizabeth, South Africa

24th – 29th Sept '06

International Symposium on Biosafety of Genetically Modified Organisms

ISBR | www.isbr.info | Jeyu | Island, South Korea

26th Sept '06

The Influence of Agriculture on Health and Wellbeing

Royal College of Physicians | www.rcplondon.ac.uk | London, UK

28th – 30th Sept '06

1st World Congress of Public Health Nutrition

SENC, IUNS | www.nutrition2006.com/eng | Barcelona, Spain

28th – 30th Sept '06

New Pathways for European Bioethics

Centre for Biomedical Ethics and Law | www.kuleuven.be | Leuven, Belgium

7th Oct '06

The Green Economics Conference

Green Economics Institute | greenecomicsinstitute@yahoo.com | London, UK

9th – 10th Oct '06

SRI – CSR: Fact, Fiction or Marketing Ploy?

Economie | gwyn@economie.co.uk | Zurich, Switzerland

9th – 13th Oct '06

Science, Technology, and Trade for Peace and Prosperity

IRC | www.irri.org/irc2006/ | New Delhi, India

12th – 13th Oct '06

Nano4Food Conference

Cientifica | www.nanofood.info | Atlanta, Georgia, USA

18th Oct '06

Tomorrow's Products

Food & Drink Innovation Network | jeffrey.hyman@fdin.co.uk | Daventry, UK

18th – 21st Oct '06

International Congress of the Local Agro-food Systems Network: Food and Territories

CITA | www.gis-syal.agropolis.fr/ALTER06/en_02.html | Baeza (Jaén), Spain

24th – 27th Oct '06

Latin American Congress on Agroforestry for Sustainable Animal Production

Experimental Station of Pastures and Forages "Indio Hatuey" and others | www.cipav.org.co | Havana, Cuba

25th – 26th Oct '06

Nano and Microtechnologies in the Food and Health Industries

The Institute of Nanotechnology, MANCEF | www.nano.org.uk/conferences/food_health | Amsterdam, Netherlands

25th – 27th Oct '06

International Food and Health Innovation Conference

IASO | www.skanefoodinnovation.com/ifhic2006 | Malmo, Sweden

4th – 11th Nov '06

Genomics 2006

International Centre for Genetic Engineering | genomic@cigb.edu.cu | Havana, Cuba

7th Nov – 9th Nov '06

Sustainability of the Agri-food Chain

EFFoST / Total Food 2006 | www.effost-conference.elsevier.com | The Hague, Netherlands

6th – 7th Dec '06

Food and Drink Futures – Driving the NPD of Tomorrow

William Reed Conferences and Leatherhead | claughton@leatherheadfood.com | London, UK

6th – 8th Dec '06

Consumption: Emerging Themes, New Approaches

Cultures of Consumption | www.consume.bbk.ac.uk | London, UK

15th – 19th Dec '06

Conference on Ecological Sustainability and Human Well-being

ISEE | www.isee2006.com/index.html | New Delhi, India